

Overland Stage 1850-1870

By Jim Strong 06 March 2006

Crude stations were built with local materials of logs, adobe and stone along the route from St. Louis, Missouri to Sacramento, California from nine to 60 miles apart along the 2,800 mile trail. Most outposts were operated by an agent and four or five well armed helpers who cared for the stock, changed relays, protected the station and prepared meals for the dusty passengers and drivers.

Food generally consisted of bacon, beans bread, onions and what passed for coffee. One dude found the food less than appetizing, consisting of stale sourdough biscuits and rancid bacon, floating in its own grease. Mark Twain described the “slumgullion” drink as “a pretense of tea, but there was too much sand and old bacon rind in it to deceive the intelligent traveler.” Others said the food was something to curdle a goat's stomach!!

The Concord Coaches were pulled by four to six horses or mules. The Salt Lake to Sacramento route in 1850 was called “Jackass Mail” because pack mules were used. In 1854 the route was moved south through Lehi and by 1858 most of the pack mules were replaced by stage coaches. The speed of the coaches varied greatly from four miles per day in rough country to about 12 miles per day over level ground or down long straight slopes. Each driver's route was about 60 miles. It usually was a rough uncomfortable ride for passengers, due to hard seats, jolting roads and insufferable dust. Six to nine passengers were accommodated inside.

William L. Ormsby (New York Herald Reporter) said stage employees without exception were courteous, civil and attentive. Mark Twain, years later wrote, the driver he had were contemptible, swaggering bullies and the station agent was a profane cutthroat wanted by the vigilantes and the district agent. He differed from his subordinates in that he was quicker on the draw!!

On 10 June 1863, near Lehi, Utah the stage from Fairfield, Utah was attacked

by about 25 Gosiute Indians about two miles north of the Lehi-Jordan Bridge. The stage was forced to stop because three of the horses were shot by the Indians. Wood Reynolds and Thomas O'Shannison put up a fight, but were killed, scalped and mutilated by the marauding Gosiute Indians. Nearby, George Kirkham (a 12 year old) witnessed the carnage and ran to Lehi to report the frightful news.

Ira D. Wines, former Lehi resident was a Pony Express Rider and Overland Stage Driver, donated a square block of property in Lehi (on Center Street) where Wines Park is located. He wanted Lehi to have a public park in honor of his deceased wife.